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RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS BRANCH

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PRESENT TRANSPORTATION SITUATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

A brief analysis of the factors which influence at present rail, water and road transportation in Czechoslovakia.

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Summary

The pre-war transportation system of Czechoslovakia was adequate to serve the economic needs of the country. Up to the present time, facilities and equipment have only slightly suffered from air raids and sabotage. In recent years, maintenance has been neglected but according to war requirements notable improvements have been made in special fields.

The present number of locomotives and railroad cars does not greatly differ from pre-war figures. The considerable increase of waterway traffic has necessitated the modernization of port facilities and the capacity of the fleet serving Czech waterways is higher at present than before the war. Many parts of the road system have probably been improved for military reasons. The number of trucks, however, has decreased greatly and most motor vehicles have been converted to substitute fuels.

The condition of facilities and equipment after the cessation of hostilities will depend on the scope of warfare, sabotage and bombing which may take place in the last period of the war.

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A. Railroads

The railroads up to the present have not been subjected to damage through air or ground warfare as intensely as those of other Axis countries. This is partially because air attacks have been generally concentrated on the aircraft, oil, and other industries; damage to railroads and facilities has been incidental in these raids. Attacks against railroads as such have not been carried out on any appreciable scale. In addition there has been no widespread sabotage against railroads, such as has occurred in France and Yugoslavia, to interfere with operation or destroy equipment. More recently there have been reports of sabotage in Eastern Slovakia and Ruthenia. It can be assumed that the advance of Russia toward Slovakia will heighten air warfare and encourage more sabotage of rail lines and facilities. At present, however, the railroad system of Czechoslovakia is in fairly good condition although suffering from the various difficulties which result from wartime strain. In the Protectorate the Germans have made efforts to bring the system into conformity with German standards of operation. In Slovakia the capacities of the main lines have been increased and other improvements have been made to lines and facilities. If Czechoslovakia is invaded, the condition of railroads and rolling stock will, of course, be unpredictable.

Locomotives and cars of Czechoslovakia have become part of the equipment pool of Germany. According to this arrangement, the demand in certain areas determines the supply irrespective

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of national boundaries. It is impossible, therefore, to determine the exact amount of equipment in Czechoslovakia at any given time. It is believed, however, that the Germans removed little equipment from Czechoslovakia since transport in this area has been essential for supplying the Eastern Front and the Balkans.

At the outbreak of war it was estimated that there were 2,351 and 662 steam locomotives in the Protectorate and Slovakia respectively, the rest of the Czech stock being divided between Germany and Hungary according to traffic demand and absorbed into their systems. This situation had not changed substantially in 1943. The freight car supply in 1938 was estimated at 76,457 in the Protectorate and Slovakia, and in 1943 at 55,800 for the Protectorate and 10,400 for Slovakia. These figures indicate a decrease in the number of freight cars -- a result of the general decline in the freight car supply in Axis Europe -- in spite of the fact that the freight traffic in both the Protectorate and Slovakia increased from 1938 to 1943.

The condition of equipment is probably poor, as the result of exhaustive wartime use and lack of systematic repair.

B. Waterways

1. General. There are two waterways systems of commercial importance within the boundaries of former Czechoslovakia: the Elbe-Moldau and the Danube. The former provides water transport from the interior of the country to the North Sea port of

Hamburg; the latter provides first-class water transport connections with all of the Danubian countries from Germany to the Black Sea. The Elbe-Moldau is navigable from Prague to the former German frontier and beyond for barges having a capacity up to 900 tons. The Moldau is navigable for much smaller craft upstream from Prague to Budweis. The so-called Middle Elbe is also navigable for small craft from Melnik (the present head of commercial navigation on the Elbe proper) to Brandeis. The channels for deep water craft in the Elbe and the Moldau were created by extensive regularization and could be damaged by heavy bombing and sabotage. As long as six months might be needed to effect emergency repairs, and permanent restoration of locks and dams after extensive damage might require years. Up to the present time the Elbe-Moldau waterway has not suffered damage sufficient to interrupt traffic or the frequency of scheduled shipping services. Low water in late summer and ice in winter may be expected to halt shipping for at least two months out of every year. The Czechoslovakian portion of the Danube is navigable for 1,000-ton barges, and covers a distance of 172 km. The Danube has been used extensively during the present war and the only serious interruptions of traffic have been caused by floating mines dropped from Allied aircraft. The Danube is naturally navigable from Czechoslovakia to its mouth, and, except for the installations at the Iron Gates, it should not suffer from the military operations now developing. Bombing and sabotage of port

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installations and the scuttling of ships are the principal contingencies affecting the resumption of shipping after the cessation of hostilities. Ice interrupts Danube shipping for at least one month every winter.

2. Traffic

a. Elbe-Moldau. In 1936 the Elbe-Moldau waterway in Czechoslovakia carried 2,100,000 tons of goods. About 60 percent of this went downstream. The principal goods transported were coal, salt, grain, and refined sugar, timber and lumber. Since the outbreak of war, there has been a marked decline in the foreign traffic which normally ascended the Elbe from the port of Hamburg. This decline has been more than offset by the policy of the Reich decreeing the use of this waterway for shipments normally going by rail. Only perishable foodstuffs and urgent war materials were exempt from this order.

b. Danube. In 1936, about 500,000 tons of goods arrived in or left Czechoslovakia by way of the Danube. The principal goods received, principally from downstream points, were cereals, petroleum and petroleum products, copper ore, and agricultural products. The chief shipments were industrial products, artificial manures, and sugar. In the following year traffic was almost doubled, and has subsequently shown steady increases.

c. Comparative Importance of Rail and Water Transport. In 1936 the railroads of Czechoslovakia transported about

69,000,000 tons of goods, while the waterways carried about 3,000,000 tons or about 4 percent of the total traffic. During the war the proportion of waterborne traffic may have reached 10 percent. It may be possible to increase the volume of waterway services should a serious shortage of rail transport develop in the post-hostilities period.

3. Ports and Facilities

a. Elbe-Moldau System. The principal Elbe-Moldau ports are as follows:

Port	1936 Traffic (metric tons)	Facilities
Aussig	600,000	2 basins. 3 km. of river-shore. 17 cranes. Mechanical equipment sufficient in 1936 for handling about 50 percent of the traffic.
Prague	900,000	3 shipping areas. 14 km. of shore. 13 cranes. Considerable additions to equipment in pre-war and war years.
Laube	400,000	21 cranes. Mechanical facilities quite old.
Melnik	246,000	6 cranes. Facilities believed to have been expanded during war.

Prior to the outbreak of war, the mechanical facilities for loading and discharging cargo in the Elbe-Moldau ports were generally outmoded and inefficient when measured in terms of modern transport requirements. Much hand labor was employed, and in some ports as much as 50 percent of the cargo was either loaded or discharged by hand. The enormous increase in traffic (at Prague, 200 percent) during the war has undoubtedly brought about many of the required improvements. Assuming some

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bomb damage and sabotage by the Germans during evacuation, it is reasonable to assume that the capacity of these ports after the cessation of hostilities will be 25 to 50 percent higher than in 1938.

b. Danube System. Bratislava, Czechoslovakia's port on the Danube, handled 1,200,000 tons of cargo in 1939. This figure was the highest in the history of the port and represented a very substantial increase over previous years (from 460,000 tons in 1935 and 490,000 tons in 1936 to 870,000 tons in 1937). Bratislava is the most modern of the Czech ports, and its facilities -- more than adequate for the traffic prior to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia -- have been expanded by the Germans to handle the raw materials and foodstuffs from the Danube basin so essential to her war effort. Bratislava has excellent rail connections and is the logical point for transshipment of goods from barge to rail. This fact is further borne out by German plans to expand the capacity of the port for the handling of 3,000,000 tons annually in the post war years.

In 1939 the port facilities of Bratislava included sixteen cranes, all of them modern, and some of them of high capacity output, one grain conveyor capable of handling 300 cubic meters of grain per hour, three pneumatic grain conveyors, and 14 warehouses with 32,000 square meters of storage space. For handling petroleum there were three oil discharging docks and a tank farm comprising twenty-seven storage units with a combined capacity of 10,550 cubic meters.

Barring bomb damage and sabotage -- the petroleum installations are the most vulnerable in this respect -- the present facilities of this port should be more than adequate for essential shipments to Czechoslovakia by way of the Danube.

4. The Fleet. In 1936 the Czech inland fleet consisted of the following types and numbers of vessels:

	Number	HP	Capacity (metric tons)
Steamboats	12	3,500	5,100
Steam tugs	81	27,800	-
Motor tugs	15	6,600	-
Motor powered cargo boats	16	4,700	6,400
Barges and tankers	947	-	347,000
Total	1,071	42,600	358,500

The Danube fleet in 1939 consisted of the following vessels:

	Number	HP	Capacity (metric tons)
Passenger boats	2	730	-
Tugs	14	8,000	-
Self-propelled barges	10	3,820	4,920
Non-powered barges	126	-	77,290
Self-propelled tank barges	3	3,600	1,500
Non-powered tank barges	17	-	13,528
Total	172	16,150	97,238

In 1936 the Czech fleet transported in domestic and foreign trade a total of 2,950,000 metric tons of goods. This figure very likely was considerably below the potential

performance of the fleet at this time, because both Danube and Elbe shipping had not completely recovered from the economic depression. The capacity of the fleet at present is probably equal to or greater than its capacity in 1936.

5. Organization of the Shipping Industry

a. Elbe-Moldau. In 1937 the principal Czech shipping company on the Elbe-Moldau was the Czechoslowakische Elbe-schiffahrts AG,[1] With the German assumption of power the firm was reorganized as the Böhmische-Mährische-Elbeschiffahrts AG, and brought within the sphere of German economic controls. It is not known just how much power Czech interests have retained in the industry. Whatever expansion the shipping industries have experienced in this waterway region has redounded mainly to the benefit of purely German companies. For example, in 1937 three companies scheduled services to Prague. In May 1944 five shipping companies served Prague, the newcomers in the field being established German companies. It is unlikely therefore that the fleet of the remaining Czech firm was expanded

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1. In addition to this firm three other Czech navigation companies were operating on German inland waterways in 1937. The Elbe-Moldau Remorquage GmbH offered towing services with a fleet of fourteen tugs. The Motor-schiffreederei "Oder" GmbH operated in the Czech zones of the ports of Hamburg and Stettin. Its equipment consisted of twelve motorized barges. The Czecho-slowakische Oderschiffahrts AG operated in the same areas and possessed seventeen tugs and seventy-four barges. The Oder is not navigable in Czechoslovakia, but some cargo ascended to the head of navigation and was transshipped to rail. The fate of these companies is not known.

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to meet the new transport demands.

b. Danube. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Czechoslovakian Danube Shipping Company was renamed the Slovakian Shipping Company. It was then brought into the Betriebsgemeinschaft der Donauschiffahrten (Working Association of Danube Shipping Companies, abbreviated BG). Though the BG dates back to 1928, it became, with the growth of German power in the Danube region, an instrument for the German domination of the shipping industry. The Slovakian shipping company now serves German interests exclusively. According to German sources, the Slovakian fleet has been increased so that its size in 1939 was almost as large as the entire Czech fleet on the Danube in 1937.

C. Roads and Motor Transport

The Czech road system before the war was adequate for national needs and in fairly good condition. Though not up to western or central European standards, it was better than the Polish road system and considerably better than that of the Balkans. From 1927 onward the Czech government carried out a systematic, if modest, program of road improvement and construction. In 1934, 4,000 kilometers of Czech roads were better than waterbound macadam; the remaining 66,000 kilometers of the road net were reportedly ordinary waterbound macadam or metalled.

During the war the road system has apparently suffered little damage from military action or sabotage and up to the present moment is presumably still in good condition despite

deterioration. It is even possible that the road system is better now than ever before as a result of wartime construction and improvements carried out under German control. In 1939 and during the early stages of the war, improvements were made on roads connecting Germany with the Sudetenland and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; routes through Slovakia were later improved for the use of military traffic to the Eastern Front.

According to a reliable British source, roughly 17,000 trucks were in circulation in the Protectorate and Slovakia in 1943 (it is not clear whether this figure is intended also to cover the Sudetenland and the part of Czechoslovakia taken by Hungary), compared to 30,000 in circulation in Czechoslovakia before the war. Most, if not all, of these trucks have undoubtedly been converted to substitute fuels and are consequently of relatively low efficiency. The trucks are probably in poor but usable condition.